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ABSTRACT

Based on an earlier study of approaches to training English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) and adult basic education (ABE) instructors, the current report draws implications and makes recommendations for delivering effective staff development. The five implications are that: (1) ABE and ESL teachers, volunteer instructors, and trainers will attend training when they value the content, it is based on their needs, and models adult learning principles; (2) development and use of quality materials requires time and money; (3) determining the effectiveness of training is an often ignored, although essential, component of staff development activities; (4) using a "trainer of trainers" is a cost-effective training model; and (5) understanding how adults learn is essential for ABE and ESL teachers and volunteer instructors. The report discusses the five implications in greater detail and makes specific recommendations for federal, state, and local policymakers and practitioners. Recommendations address aspects of training program design, development, and implementation, and allocation of resources. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR EFFECTIVE ABE/ESL STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE *STUDY OF ABE/ESL INSTRUCTOR TRAINING APPROACHES*

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DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR EFFECTIVE ABE/ESL STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE *STUDY OF ABE/ESL INSTRUCTOR TRAINING APPROACHES*

The necessity for effective staff development for adult basic education (ABE) and English-as-a-second language (ESL) teachers and volunteer instructors is a perennial topic of discussion and debate familiar to all who work in or who have studied these areas. Such discussions often focus on problems and roadblocks to providing training for ABE and ESL teachers and volunteer instructors resulting from the principally part-time nature of the adult education delivery system, the high rate of instructor turnover, and the wide range of instructor skill levels. Findings from the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches* suggest ways in which effective staff development for adult education teachers and volunteer instructors can be provided.[1] Based on information collected during the study, five implications for delivering effective staff development are:

- ABE and ESL teachers, volunteer instructors and trainers will attend training when they value the content, it is based on their needs, and models adult learning principles.
- The development and use of quality materials requires time and money.

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[1] Supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches* has been conducted by Pelavin Associates, Inc. along with San Francisco State University and the Adult Learning Resource Center. Study activities included collecting available data and materials on staff development activities in all 50 states; reviewing research literature and current thinking on the subject; visiting staff development programs; conducting focus groups with teachers and volunteer instructors; developing instructional packets for training ABE and ESL teachers and volunteer instructors; field testing the materials; and conducting a series of workshops at which training on the packets was provided. Copies of study reports are available from the Division of Adult Education and Literacy, (202) 205-9996, or from Pelavin Associates, (202) 785-3308.

- Determining the effectiveness of training is an often ignored, although certainly essential component of staff development activities.
- Using a "trainer of trainers" approach for providing staff development is a cost-effective training model.
- Understanding how adults learn is essential for ABE and ESL teachers and volunteer instructors.

The following is a discussion of the five implications, as well as a presentation of related recommendations for Federal, state, and local policymakers and practitioners interested in developing a plan for providing effective staff development.

AE[illegible]nd ESL Teachers, Volunteer Instructors and Trainers Will Attend Training When They Value the Content

Conventional wisdom holds that adult education teachers and volunteer instructors do not attend training programs. We found, however, that instructors, as well as trainers are extremely interested in staff development when they can see value in its content and when training is provided in an appropriate format.

Overwhelmingly positive responses to training presented at the field tests and the training workshops conducted as part of the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches* were, in fact, reminiscent of the popular movie *Field of Dreams*. In the film, a farmer, after receiving a telepathic message assuring him that "If you build it, they will come," finds that turning his cornfield into a baseball diamond has the effect of drawing forth from the past the best of long-vanished greats who still have a desire to play the game. Similarly, we found that adult education teachers and volunteer instructors, as well as trainers, are drawn to quality training materials presented in an environment conducive to learning.

Participation rates for the different training activities were extremely high. Return rates for the second sessions of the field tests ranged, with one exception, between 64 percent and 82 percent. Responses to the national training workshop were double the number anticipated with more than 160 individuals, trainers, program administrators, and educators from all 50 states participating. Also, approximately 200 participants

from throughout the nation attended the four regional training workshops. Most participants were supported by state and local agencies, indicating a willingness to invest in training if they believe it to be valuable for their trainers and practitioners.

Valued Training

Participants' positive responses at the field tests, the national training workshop, and regional workshops can be attributed to several factors. These include:

- ***Basing training on the needs of teachers and volunteer instructors.*** The research indicates that effective staff development programs are based on systematically identified needs of adult education teachers and volunteer instructors, and not simply on an administrator's vague perceptions of what is required. Instructional packets developed during this study are based on training needs identified by teachers and volunteer instructors in the field. Consequently, participants at the field tests and the training workshops recognized that information and skills to be gained from the training would satisfy instructors' needs and fill a knowledge gap.

- ***Placing learning in the context of theory.*** All packets incorporate theoretical background and, when possible, applied research findings. Introducing theory into the training provides a context for understanding practices being taught so that teachers and volunteer instructors do not feel they are learning in a vacuum.

- ***Providing sequenced and follow-up training.*** The packets are designed to be offered in multiple sessions to allow participants to practice the skills being presented. Sequenced and follow-up training provides instructors with adequate time to learn new skills and concepts, practice what has been learned in familiar instructional settings, and receive feedback from trainers and peers at a follow-up session.

- ***Modeling adult learning principles.*** Instructional training packets are based on the andragogical model of adult learning with training oriented to real-life situations and drawing on participants' prior learning and experiences. All packets are learner centered, with participants inductively learning new concepts and information. Trainers serve as facilitators, providing guidance and structuring activities that enable participants to acquire new knowledge about instructional practices. Trainers also model techniques to be used in the instructors' classrooms.

- ***Demonstrating skills.*** All instructional training packets provide an opportunity for participants to see new practices demonstrated, usually through a video classroom demonstration, and sometimes through role playing. Participants at the field tests and at the national training workshop reported that videos are especially useful because they help lock in the concepts being

taught by allowing participants to observe experienced teachers, to analyze demonstrated teaching skills, and to make concrete the application of theory to practice. It is easier for teachers and volunteer instructors to learn new skills when they can see those skills demonstrated. When videos are not available, alternative mechanisms for demonstration (e.g., case studies, role playing, modeling, and peer coaching) are suggested.

- ***Providing opportunities for reflection.*** At least once, instructional training packets include the opportunity for participants to reflect on completed workshop activities in relation to their own instructional expectations. These analyses enable participants to consider the types of thinking and learning that the activities stimulate. By reflecting on the activities, participants become more conscious of theories and assumptions that underlie the training and acquire a better understanding of how adults learn.

- ***Providing opportunities to network.*** In addition to enhancing their knowledge of the field and acquiring new instructional practices, participants at the training workshops were provided an opportunity to network with other trainers and practitioners. Networking is particularly important for adult education teachers and volunteer instructors who, as mostly part-time instructors, hold other jobs and have little opportunity to interact with colleagues. Such isolation limits their potential to learn from one another and to validate their own teaching practices.

Recommendations

Training valued by adult education practitioners will attract participants. For that reason, knowledge of what makes the training valued is the first step in providing an effective staff development program. The next step is for state and local programs to incorporate these valued elements within their training. The following recommendations in planning effective staff development programs should be considered:

- **Provide staff development through multiple session workshops that enable participants to practice what they have learned in real teaching environments.** The success of the sequenced training workshops debunks the traditional wisdom that, given the constraints of the adult education system — the part-time nature of adult education instruction and services, the high rate of teacher turnover, the minimal guidelines regarding certification, and the limited inservice training requirements — instructors cannot be expected to attend more than one-shot workshops.

- **Incorporate elements of effective staff development within all training activities.** As discussed above, elements that make training valuable to participants include: providing training services responsive to the needs of the participants; placing learning within a

theoretical framework; providing sequenced and follow-up training; modeling adult learning principles; and demonstrating skills through the use of videos and role play. These elements help foster the transfer of knowledge from the workshop to the instructors' learning environment.

- **Provide opportunities for adult education teachers and volunteer instructors to share information and materials with other practitioners.** Networking opportunities were cited by participants at the national training workshop as one of the most valuable aspects of their training. Administrators of some statewide training organizations in the study noted that delivering training services through a regional approach has promoted a sense of regional spirit among instructors. This sense of camaraderie lessens the feeling of isolation often felt by part-time teachers and leads to an increased sharing of ideas and materials. In addition to regional training, administrators should think of other ways to promote networking. One easy-to-implement networking strategy is providing telephone lists of training participants so attendees can later share information and materials.

- **Adopt a comprehensive staff development program incorporating a variety of staff development strategies.** A multiple session workshop is only one approach that should be used for training adult education teachers and volunteer instructors. Several approaches that have recently come into prominence actively involve teachers and volunteer instructors in their own training. These include: (1) "self-directed learning" (the adult education teacher or volunteer instructor determines the areas in which he or she would like to receive training); (2) "peer coaching" (emphasizes the concept of "teachers teaching teachers" and helps teachers master particular skills through repeated demonstrations and opportunities to practice in a supportive environment); and (3) "action research" (teachers identify questions that interest them and plan for and conduct systematic inquiry in their own teaching environments as they work with their own students).

Development and Use of Quality Materials Requires Time and Money

The development of quality training materials useful to teachers and volunteer instructors cannot be accomplished overnight. The instructional packets developed through this study are detailed and comprehensive training materials. They include step-by-step instructions as well as sample announcements for the training, reminder letters for the follow-up sessions, overhead masters, hand-out masters, and supplementary readings. In addition, it is essential to invest time in planning how to incorporate new materials into the staff development process. Developing quality materials is a

rather lengthy and comprehensive process requiring enough time and money to support adequate research, field testing, and necessary revision.

Research

Instructional packet development requires in-depth knowledge not only of content areas but of effective adult education practices. To ensure that training content is accurate and reflects the best thinking in the field, the instructional packet developers gathered information through literature reviews, ethnographic studies, interviews with instructors, trainers, and researchers, and reviews of other instructional training materials. Findings from ethnographic studies became the source for the case studies included in the instructional packets; interviews allowed developers to draw on the perspectives of practitioners and to incorporate their needs, expertise, and concerns into the materials; and reviews of other instructional materials provided a few models for the packets and allowed for identification of videos that could be included in the materials.

Field Tests

Training materials should be field-tested in a real-world setting before they are distributed. Two types of field tests were conducted during the materials development process. Informal field tests during the initial stages of development provided important input for the direction of the packets. Developers "tried out" portions of the instructional packets with ABE and ESL teachers and volunteer instructors at various local programs. Formal field testing, conducted with adult education teachers and volunteer instructors at adult education programs across the country — and generally consisting of two three-to-four hour sessions approximately one month apart — determined the final design of the instructional training packets. Although costly and time consuming, formal field tests provided an opportunity to determine how well materials work in actual situations. Field test evaluations were based on observations by packet developers and on the comments of training participants, and other observers. Packet revisions were based on field tests.

Integration of New Materials

Developing materials is only one aspect of providing quality training for teachers and volunteer instructors. Another aspect requires planning and support from state and local staff development program administrators to integrate new materials into the overall staff development process. Such planning not only familiarizes staff with the new instructional materials, it guarantees that the materials are used most effectively with teachers and volunteer instructors.

After the national training workshop, several state administrators took the lead in formulating a plan to incorporate the instructional packets into their programs. Ohio, Minnesota, Maryland, Tennessee, and West Virginia are among the states now using national workshop participant trainers to instruct teachers and volunteers. Minnesota, for example, has trained 40 trainers with several packets, who, in turn, have been providing workshops for instructors throughout the state.

Recommendations

Administrators and policymakers need to recognize that providing quality staff development for their teachers and volunteer instructors is not a simple process. A long-term commitment must be made to ensure that quality materials are developed and effectively used. The following recommendations are targeted to programs at the Federal, state, and local levels.

The Federal Government and states should:

- **Invest resources in materials development.** An overwhelming need for quality materials to train adult education teachers and volunteer instructors was identified by participants at the training workshops as well as through previous study activities. Through Section 353 of the Adult Education Act, states receive a 15 percent set-aside of their basic state grant for special projects and must spend two-thirds of such funds (10 percent of the basic state grant) on staff development. With those funds, states should support the development of materials for training adult education teachers and volunteer instructors including field-testing materials in a real-world setting. Material development also should be a priority of the National Institute for Literacy and State Literacy Resource Centers.

States should:

- **Provide timely technical assistance to assure the appropriate use of new materials.** Developing quality materials is only one step in a process. Resources for training and

technical assistance are necessary to assure that the materials are used appropriately and do not simply remain on the shelf. The State Literacy Resource Centers can use their funds to provide needed training, and states should require Section 353 grant recipients to provide training on any new materials developed with those funds.

State and local programs should:

- **Develop plans for integrating new instructional materials into their overall staff development process.** Administrators responsible for staff development need to lead in developing a plan for incorporating quality instructional materials into their staff development programs. Such a plan involves disseminating materials to state and local programs and providing training on the use of materials. Dissemination strategies may include "updates" mailed to state and local programs or "notes" in adult education newsletters alerting staff development personnel to the availability of new training materials.

Determining the Effectiveness of Training is an Often Ignored, Although Essential Component of Staff Development Activities

Focusing on effective elements of staff development, quality materials, and well-trained instructors, while important, means nothing unless there is a transfer of knowledge from the training to the instructors' own learning environment. "The proof," as the saying goes, "is in the pudding." Put another way, the must-ask question is: Has the behavior of teachers and volunteer instructors changed as a result of training? Simply participating in a certain number of training workshops or completing a required number of training hours does not ensure that new skills and concepts have been mastered or will be used. Competency is demonstrated when instructors can incorporate new skills into their own classrooms.

A critical component of staff development involves ongoing and systematic evaluation procedures that focus on changes in instructional practices resulting from the training. Such evaluation activities are both program effective and cost effective. The Federal model indicators of program quality include a staff development indicator for states to consider in conducting their Federally-required evaluations. Unfortunately, research offers little evaluation data on what happens in the classroom after the training. Most evaluations of staff development programs measure the "happiness quotient" — what do you like most and least — rather than identifying changes that take place in

instructional practice. In designing an evaluation format to assess the impact of training on teachers' and volunteer instructors' classroom work, staff development programs need to ask the following questions:

- How did teachers and volunteer instructors benefit?
- What did they learn?
- What did they apply?
- How well were the information and practices applied?

Recommendations

Evaluating staff development programs is a weak link in the delivery of services to teachers and volunteer instructors. In order to ensure that training has been effective, state and local programs should:

- **Allocate Federal and state resources to evaluate the effectiveness of staff development programs.** Findings from study activities indicate that one of the primary reasons evaluations are not conducted is because of limited money available. However, more resources than ever before are now available for training under the Section 353 set-aside and administrators need to ensure that some of those funds are allocated to support an evaluation component.

- **Build an evaluation component into staff development programs.** There are a variety of strategies that can be implemented to determine whether or not training has resulted in new instructional behaviors in the classroom; whatever strategies are employed, administrators need to ensure that evaluations are ongoing. Options include: (1) obtaining feedback from local program directors on how training is translated into changed teaching behaviors; (2) conducting follow-up training during which instructors can report back on what skills and techniques they have applied in their classroom; and (3) conducting pre- and post-training onsite observations to determine whether new teaching techniques are being incorporated in the classroom.

- **Use evaluation data to improve the effectiveness of staff development activities.** Conducting an evaluation of staff development activities will lead to better services only if data are used to improve training. Evaluation findings should be of use to administrators and instructors; and changes in staff development activities resulting from evaluation data also should be documented.

The Trainer of Trainers Approach: A Cost-Effective Model

Investing in training a corps of master trainers is a cost-effective method of providing widespread training. Under a trainer of trainers approach a small group of adult education trainers (most often practitioners) receive special training on a variety of topics in order to provide staff development workshops for instructors in their district, region, or state. This approach was used in organizing the national and regional workshops, with the goal of training trainers from each of the 50 states on the use of the instructional packets and having them return home to train other adult education teachers and volunteer instructors. States such as Ohio, Maryland, Minnesota, Tennessee, and West Virginia, have reported that trainers who attended the national workshop are currently engaged in training other adult education teachers.

Developing a cadre of skilled trainers has the added attraction of enabling administrators to provide their less-experienced instructors with mentors, a practice identified in the K-12 staff development literature as a valuable staff development activity. Repeated demonstrations by master trainers and opportunities to practice and receive feedback in a supportive environment enhance the transfer of skills to the instructors' own learning environment. In addition, it allows less experienced instructors to work on the content and instructional practices where they are having the most difficulty.

Recommendations

State and local program administrators should:

- **Develop a group of master trainers who can serve as resources throughout the state.** By developing and supporting master trainers, local adult education programs will have access to their expertise on an on-going basis. Such trainers can become mentors under a system of peer coaching. They can work with small groups of individual instructors to provide needed staff development; plan, design, and execute regional training workshops; and provide training during summer workshops.

- **Commit resources to training master trainers.** Administrators need to seriously consider an investment in training trainers. This investment can be cost effective if a staff development program is in place that provides ongoing training to teachers and volunteer instructors. In addition, administrators should consider providing financial incentives for adult

educators to become master teachers. While the K-12 educational system struggles with the concept of a variable pay scale for master teachers, the adult education system may want to take the lead and provide a model for compensating them.

Understanding How Adults Learn is Essential for Teachers and Volunteer Instructors

The K-12 teaching background of most adult education instructors does not adequately prepare them to teach adults. It is important for adult education teachers and volunteer instructors to recognize that adults have their own purposes in learning, that their timeframes for learning are different from those of children, that they bring different experiences to the learning environment, that they are more self-directed than children, and that they want learning to be problem centered and oriented to real-life situations.

Teachers and volunteer instructors with whom we spoke during the study identified critical differences between teaching children and teaching adults, and indicated a need for training in recognizing and teaching toward those differences. They felt that information about adult motivation, developmental sequences, learning styles, and sociocultural contexts would help them to select appropriate instructional content and methods.

Recommendation

Besides comprehending how the adult learner learns, both teachers and volunteer instructors must understand the particular qualities that adults bring to the learning environment. State and local programs should, therefore:

- **Provide teachers and volunteer instructors with training in understanding and teaching the adult learner.** It is important that staff development programs provide a core body of knowledge on the characteristics of adult learners and the principles of adult learning. Such knowledge will enable teachers and volunteer instructors to plan appropriate lessons for adult learners and provide a learning environment that is positive for both instructors and learners.

For teaching to be effective, and for adult learners to feel successful, instructional strategies need to be linked to the participants' learning styles and modalities, as well as to their cognitive development. Without an understanding of these basic principles, students and instructors often function at cross purposes; with training comes understanding and success.